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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001533

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SUBJECT: CHIEF OJO MADUEKWE TO BE FOREIGN MINISTER?

Classified by Ambassador John Campbell for reasons 1.4 (b & d).

¶1. (C) At a farewell dinner he hosted for the departing Israeli Ambassador and me, PDP General Secretary Ojo Maduekwe "let it be known" that he will be Nigeria's next Foreign Minister. I took the opportunity to underscore to him the importance of continued, indeed, increased Nigerian engagement in Darfur and Somalia. Ambassador Gribbin, U.S. Charge from July 19, and DCM Furey were also present. See paragraph 5 for comment, paragraph 6 for a biographic note. End summary.

¶2. (C) It is been rumored that Maduekwe would be the next Foreign Minister, but opposition from his Abia home state Senators was a bump in the road that was somehow smoothed over only last week. (Among other things, the dinner, which included most of the Abia state PDP functionaries, appeared to be a reconciliation event.) It is customary in Abuja for the Foreign Minister to group together departing ambassadors for a farewell lunch or dinner, and the Canadian High Commissioner had also been invited. So, Maduekwe's invitation was already something of an indication that he would be next Foreign Minister. Though the ministerial appointment was openly discussed by both guests and host, the Senate has not yet formally approved it. Nevertheless, Maduekwe told me that he expects the cabinet to be sworn in by July 20.

¶3. (C) When he met with the President to be "interviewed" for the position of Foreign Minister, Maduekwe told me that President Yar'adua told him "to always tell the truth, bad news as well as good." Maduekwe affected to be surprised by his nomination to be Foreign Minister, but was clearly delighted. He assured me that he is "thoroughly pro-American" and is regarded as one of the "westerners" in Nigerian politics. (In my experience, this is true; at present at least one of his children is in medical school in the U.S., another practices medicine in the U.S., and all the rest have had some schooling in the U.S.)

¶4. (C) In a brief, private conversation I underscored the importance of Nigeria's continued engagement with Darfur and Somalia. I noted A/S Fraser's conversation with President Yar'adua in which she recalled former President Obasanjo's commitment to providing increased Nigerian troops for Somalia. Maduekwe appeared only broadly aware of the issues - he was clearly more focused on putting together the cabinet from the perspective of the PDP.

¶5. (C) Comment: Maduekwe has been a survivor. I first knew him in the late '80's when he was a lawyer in Lagos interested in human rights and constitutional issues. He compromised himself with the human rights community by working with the Abacha dictatorship-at one point, he was presenting himself as Abacha's likely ambassador to the U.S. In the first Obasanjo administration he was Minister of Transport, and has been General Secretary of the PDP. While he said

to me that he had "always" opposed Obasanjo's aspirations for a Third Term, he certainly was not vocal about such opposition. When I met with him immediately after the April elections, he made no effort to defend them. Now, he does, saying that "there were irregularities, but Yar'Adua would have won anyway." The son of a Presbyterian minister, he remains an active churchman, and was President Obasanjo's usual personal representative at that denomination's major activities. His last two positions - Minister of Transport and ruling party General Secretary - provided opportunity for corruption.

Yet, he and his family live simply, and on the street he is not named as one of the corrupt circle that surrounded the former President.

¶6. (C) Biographic note: Chief Ojo Maduekwe was born May 6, 1949 in Arochukwu local government area of Abia state. He read law at the University of Nigeria at Nsukka. He practiced law in Lagos for many years and in 1983 spent several months as a member of the House of Representatives until a military coup unseated the government. Maduekwe was a member of the Constitutional Conferences of 1988-89 and 1994-95. He served as a Special Assistant to the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1994-1996 (during the Abacha regime) and was widely criticized for publicly supporting Abacha's "self-succession" plan in 1997. Maduekwe joined the PDP in 1999 and contested for a Senatorial position in 1999, but lost in the PDP primary. He was named Minister of Culture and Tourism by President Obasanjo in June 1999 and in 2000 was moved to head the Ministry of Transport, a position he occupied until 2003. While Minister of Transport, Maduekwe promoted the use of bicycles in order to curb fuel usage. He gained fame for once riding a bike to a weekly session of the Federal Executive Council, trailed by an army of journalists. He served for a short period in 2003 as President Obasanjo's Special Advisor on Constitutional and Legal Matters and was rewarded for helping President Obasanjo consolidate control of the PDP and gain re-election by being named the National Secretary of the PDP in 2003.

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Maduekwe's current ministerial nomination is viewed by most commentators as a reward for his loyalty and service to the PDP. He is not known to be personally close to President Yar'Adua and his legal career was not particularly noteworthy. His nomination was briefly challenged by all three Senators from Abia state which probably reflects the fact that he is an Abuja-based politician who lacks grassroots political ties to his home state. Ojo Maduekwe and his wife Ucha have 2 sons and 2 daughters. At least one of the children is currently finishing her medical studies in the Boston area, and other children spent some time in the United States for schooling.

CAMPBELL